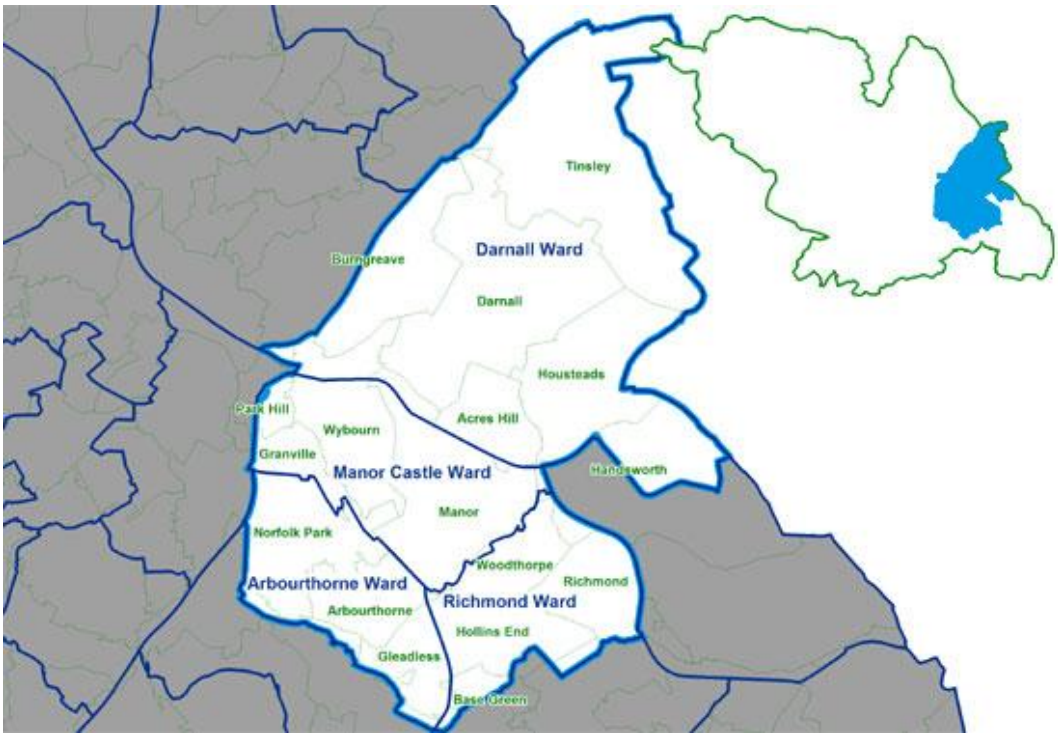
Department of Landscape, University of Sheffield

Developing an Area Based Approach to open space management

An evaluation of the East Green and Open Spaces Strategy (GOSS) process



Alice Mathers, Mel Burton and Chris Wainwright
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Executive Summary

This report forms part of the research into practice output from the EU INTERREG IVB-funded 'MP4: Making Places Profitable, Public and Private Open spaces' project. MP4 is a transnational collaborative research and practical implementation project, undertaken by a partnership of nine Project Partners that include Universities and public bodies in the EU 'North Sea Region'. The MP4 project aims to demonstrate how the positive socio-economic impacts of open space improvements can be maintained in the long term through innovative 'place-keeping' approaches.

Through a focussed investigation of cross-organisational (public, private and third-sector) capacity, as part of a strategic Steering Group, this report reveals the potential for an area based approach to facilitate place-keeping and identifies factors of capacity that affect the Steering Group's partnership's capability to sustain the place-making and place-keeping of green and open spaces.

Recommendations generated as a result of this report, highlight a need for greater research into the concept of partnership capacity and associated implications for cross-organisational partnerships, particularly in times of economic constraint. Through evaluation of these place-keeping partnerships, this report identifies clear potential for the wider employment of area based approaches, and an evolution of cross-organisational roles in place-keeping.

We hope that this report enables those in policy, practice and from the community, to further engage with partnership approaches to place-keeping, with greater understanding as to how these can have mutually beneficial outcomes.

Finally, the researchers would like to thanks all East GOSS Steering Group members who took part in this research for giving up their time to be interviewed.

Introduction

City GOSS background

Sheffield is one of the UK's largest cities and a member of the Core Cities group[1]. The city is located in the metropolitan county of South Yorkshire with a population of approximately 555,000[2]. This population is ethnically diverse, with 17% from black or minority ethnic groups and a significant student population from the two universities (the University of Sheffield and Sheffield Hallam University). Sheffield has a wide variety of green space typologies, including urban, sub-urban, parkland and woodland, agriculture and arable land, meadow and freshwater areas. There are 170 woodlands, 78 public parks and 10 public gardens in Sheffield, in addition to areas of the Peak National Park that lie within the city boundaries. This results in 61% of the city as comprising green and open spaces[3].

Recognition by the local authority (Sheffield City Council) of this green resource was embedded through the Sheffield Green and Open Spaces Strategy (GOSS), driven by the rationale that '*Green and open spaces play a vital role in the city's sustainable development'*[4]. Four themes (people, places, environment and sustainability and quality management) guide the workings of the GOSS, with the aim of delivering four principle outcomes:

1. A visible improvement in the quality and safety of local green and open spaces, recognisable to residents and resulting in greater participation.
2. Communities participating actively, getting involved in management and decisions on their local spaces.
3. An even greener Sheffield – contributing on a regional scale to managing climate change and conserving biodiversity.
4. Sheffield firmly established as a national centre of excellence for green space management.

The GOSS is a corporate strategy forming a link with other strategies, assisting in their delivery, acting as part of the wider Sheffield City Council Corporate Plan and linking local delivery with national and regional guidance. It covers all green and open spaces, in both rural and urban areas, within the metropolitan local of Sheffield including those designated as National Park. As such the GOSS is the intended mechanism through which management and quality improvements to green and open spaces can be achieved. It was developed between 2006 and 2009, through consultation with local people, stakeholders and a network of partners including: Friends groups, Tenant and Resident Associations (TARAs) and local interest groups. The latest in a series of strategic guidance, the GOSS was preceded by a number of key green and open space policies i.e. the Parks Regeneration Strategy (1993 - 99),

[1] For further information on the Core Cities see www.corecities.com
[2] Office for National Statistics, 2010.
[3] Sheffield City Council, 2012b; 2012c.
[4] For further information see 'Sheffield's Great Outdoors: Green and Open Space Strategy 2010-2030' available for download at www.sheffield.gov.uk/out--about/parks-woodlands--countryside/green-and-open-space-strategy.html

Sheffield's Countryside Strategy (1999), Sheffield Site Categorisation Strategy (2000), Best Value Review (2002) and Local Area Action Plans (2004 to present).

The GOSS is driven by a partnership approach, with a number of key organisations identified to facilitate delivery of GOSS objectives, who include: Sheffield First Partnership boards, Active Sheffield, NHS Sheffield, Sheffield Wildlife Trust, Natural England and the Environment Agency, Groundwork, Green Estate, the British Trust of Conservation Volunteers (BTCV), the Local Access Forum, the Ramblers' Association, SCC Access Liaison Group and SheBEEN. Whilst implementation of the GOSS is the responsibility of SCC Parks and Countryside Service, the Steering Group (Green and Open Space Core Management Group) consisting of a range of the key green and open space owners, managers and providers.

The partnership approach taken within the GOSS runs congruent to development of a more localised agenda. This is embedded through collaborative working with the Community Assemblies to support area prioritisation and improvement. In further support of this, in Year One of the GOSS Action Points (2010-2011), translation of the city-wide strategic aims into achievable actions at a local level identified the need for a pilot of an area-based approach. As such the East Assembly Area of Sheffield was suggested, due to a high level of existing knowledge regarding its green and open spaces, collated through historic partnership working, development of strategic spatial master plans and coordinated regeneration plans.

East GOSS background

The East Assembly area covers the wards of Manor Castle, Darnall, Arbourthorne and Richmond, covering Manor, Darnell and Norfolk Park. The East Community Assembly is one of seven Community Assemblies that work closely with their respective communities to help decide how services are delivered to improve their quality of life[5].

The aim of the East GOSS is to pilot an area-based approach to the GOSS and evaluate the benefits of working in this way. To lead this pilot, the social enterprise/ third sector organisation Green Estate[6] was identified by SCC as an apolitical organisation, heavily involved, and experienced, in the development of green and open spaces across the East Area. In 2011 they were approached by SCC to take a leading role through development of an East GOSS Steering Group.

To launch the East GOSS Steering Group, Green Estate held an initial meeting on 16th September 2011, to which they invited those representing key organisations (as identified by Green Estate and SCC) in the East Area who had an interest/expertise in the development and management of green and open spaces. This meeting was billed as a 'coalition of the willing', with the aim to keep the process "relatively simple and provide us with some measurable benefits – without any additional resources" (Green Estate, 22nd July 2011). At this point in the process, Green Estate suggested the following activities for Steering Group action:

1. Mapping what we have (both spatially and against the 4 GOSS themes)

[5] Sheffield City Council, 2012b
[6] For further information on Green Estate: www.greenestate.org.uk

2. Identifying Gaps (again spatially and against the 4 GOSS themes)
3. Drawing up a 3 Year Area Action Plan that focuses on Local Priorities.
4. Evaluating the approach.

Attendance at the initial Steering Group meeting comprised the following organisations: Green Estate, SCC, Sheffield Wildlife Trust, East Area Community Assembly and University of Sheffield (as observers of the process). As a result of initial Steering Group discussions, 8 priority projects (and ways of working) for the East GOSS were decided:

1. **Continue with a group that meets 4 times a year to progress achievement of the East GOSS**. Largely complete the Audit Map and Information. Adopt a process of compiling simple updates to the map and matrix prior and during each meeting. Receive and share progress reports on projects and look to align support and resources where applicable. Work together on overarching green infrastructure projects.

2. **Evaluate whether this approach to area wide place-keeping is an effective use of resources**. The University of Sheffield will incorporate this into the MP4 Project, attend meetings etc and produce an evaluation report.

3. **Excitement, Outdoor and Natural Play**. There will be some gaps in formal play but the East Area seemed to also be an ideal location to push the agenda on more sustainable and child centred approaches to playful landscapes.

4. **Embed design guidelines and sustainability issues where ever possible in new developments**. With a specific emphasis on ones easier to influence such as Sheffield housing company and the Highways pfi (especially SUDS, flood mitigation, habitat creation, linkages and access to connecting spaces, views etc.

5. **Resident and Visitor Image and Identity of neighbourhoods.** How to build on positive experiences and reduce negative perceptions.

6. **Encourage better and more holistic site management through the development of a suite of Site Management Plans and a wide variety of organisations using these to achieve the Sheffield Standards.** Encourage the use with all land managers of the one page Management Plan[7] that has been produced.

7. **Using more creative ways to get user and non user feedback to continue to shape future investment or management priorities.**

8. Explore the feasibility of an action research project that could see areas of public open space with low amenity and environmental value converted to lower or same cost but higher value landscapes through **alternative management** (hay cut, meadow, sheep grazing or forestry).

Steering Group partners were then assigned responsibility to drive forward individual priority projects. Second and third, face-to-face, Steering Group meetings subsequently

[7] Produced by SCC Parks and Countryside department.

occurred (on the 11th November 2011 and 10th February 2012) to report back on progress relating to the priority projects. At the second of these meetings (11th November 2011) the University of Sheffield committed to undertaking the role of East GOSS 'critical friend', evaluating the emerging East GOSS partnership and progress.

Research methodology

Within the East GOSS development process, the University of Sheffield has been given the role of 'critical friend' in order to evaluate the working practice and approach of the East GOSS Steering Group, and answer the following:

Is this process effective and transferable? To evaluate whether a coalition of the willing, with no additional resources working in this way, delivers better and testing whether the approach is transferable to other areas (East GOSS Pilot Workshop, 16th September 2011)

Partnership Capacity

This report introduces the concept of *capacity* as a means to understand and respond to issues of sustainability in green space partnership working through the experience of the East GOSS Steering Group. There are several interpretations of the term *capacity*. In landscape theory it is used to describe the degree to which a particular landscape type can accommodate change. Social interpretations define a collective (community) or interrelated (partnership) resource and identify qualities in relation to social capacity including the existence of resources (skills, commitment), networks of relationships, leadership and support mechanisms for activation of participative processes As a development of these ideas, *partnership capacity* is described here as:

Partnership capacity is the degree to which public-private-community partnerships are able to withstand and respond to changes in support, and remain actively involved and effective in developing and sustaining green space quality.

Understanding factors that contribute to partnership capacity is a key aim of this report. This is particularly pertinent in light of the current UK economic and political climate, where public service cuts are forcing Local Authorities to look more closely at external partnerships as a means to sustain service delivery. The Local Authority service cuts this report refers to are illustrated by two recent articles in the Sheffield Telegraph[8]. As part of a wider drive to save £57m over the next financial year, Sheffield City Council are due to put in place measures to reduce their parks, woodlands and open spaces budget by £1.2m. Proposed cuts and income generation packages include: increasing fees for football and cricket pitches, introducing car-parking charges for three major parks (Graves, Hillsborough and Millhouses), reducing maintenance for bowling greens, increasing allotment rates and reduced council support for the annual Environment Week and grants for Sheffield Wildlife Trust, Yorkshire Wildlife Trust and Green Estates. Councillor Leigh Bramall[9] explained that although the council recognised the importance of green open spaces they are not immune to spending cuts. The long-term aim is to reduce spending whilst maintaining standards as far as possible. This would be achieved by:

- Exploring ways to generate income and increase efficiency;
- Offering advice and guidance to community groups;

[8] Kay, 2012a; 2012b.
[9] Kay, 2012a.

- Undertaking consultation processes to hear local people's and user group's feelings and discuss their proposals to save and/or generate funds.

This study into the capacity of a cross-organisational Steering Group partnership, and development of an area based approach, provides a template for evaluating, whether these *two drivers* of *income generation* and *increased efficiency* are realistic in ensuring open space sustainability. Within this, we seek to unpack the idea of community as a homogenous resource, and look to develop a practical understanding of factors that contribute to greater partnership capacity. Through this we identify six dimensions of capacity that facilitate cross-organisational partnerships in times of devolved governance, and recommend key areas for public and community development.

Research undertaken within a previous study into green space community and Local Authority partnerships (Mathers *et al.,* 2011) identified six key capacity themes applicable to contexts of green space partnership working. These themes were adapted to reflect the wider cross-organisational context of the East GOSS study, and employed within semi-structured interviews to evaluate the partnership capacity of the East GOSS Steering Group (see Table 1). This evaluation involved:

1. Two sets of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with all East GOSS Steering Group members.
2. Interviews to be carried out towards the beginning of the East GOSS Pilot Process (Phase 1)[10] and at the close of the process (Phase 2)[11].

The interviews were designed to collect information regarding the partner experience of the East GOSS Pilot Steering Group and their capacity throughout the pilot process to work together to deliver an Area Based Approach to open space management. They focused on:

1. Steering Group background (member context)
2. Six Steering Group capacity themes (SWOT analysis):
- Communication
- Motivation
- Membership
- Ownership
- Methods
- Expectations
3. Steering Group Networks

Between the 5th and 16th January 2012, eight Phase 1 interviews were carried out with Steering Group members. The interviews were transcribed and the data collected qualitatively analysed to establish (under the six capacity themes, Table 2) a holistic picture of the current place-keeping capacity of the East GOSS Pilot Steering Group.

The interviewee responses to Section 1 of the interviews (Steering Group background) provided an overview of: the individual natures of the partner organisations (public, political, private, community etc.), their responsibility regarding green spaces, the spatial area with which they were involved, their relationship to other Steering Group partners and what they foresaw as their role within the Steering Group Partnership (Tables 3a-3e).

[10] This report provides an evaluation of Phase 1 of the East GOSS process
[11] A second evaluation report will be produced at the end of Phase 2 to reflect on the process at this later stage.

Table 1: Phase 1 Interviews

	SG Member	Abbrv.	Organisation
1	Chief Executive Officer	(CEO)	Green Estate
2	Head of Operations	(HO)	Sheffield and Rotherham Wildlife Trust
3	Community Partnership Manager	(CPM)	Parks and Countryside, Sheffield City Council
4	Area Officer, East Area	(AO)	Parks and Countryside, Sheffield City Council
5	Programme Manager	(PM)	Parks and Countryside, Sheffield City Council
6	Environmental Regeneration Manager	(ERM)	Green Estate
7	Community Assembly Manager	(CAM)	East Area Community Assembly
8	Regeneration Manager	(RM)	Regeneration Team, Sheffield City Council

Table 2: Capacity themes discussed in interviews

	Capacity theme	Theme description
1	**Motivation**	The motivational drive of the partner's involvement in the site in terms of social, environmental or political interest etc.
2	**Communication**	The communication capability of the partner (both internally and externally) in facilitating the development and management of the site.
3	**Membership**	The experience of membership in terms of it being open or closed, the process of invitation and the perception of belonging/connection to other members
4	**Ownership**	The perception of ownership in terms of the process, partnership, expected outcomes and dissemination
5	**Methods**	The methods employed throughout the process of developing an Area Based Approach
6	**Expectations**	The expected outcomes of the Area Based Approach in terms of deliverable capacity, benefits to area, city and partners etc and transferability of lessons and the process of partnership working.

Tables 3a – 3e: Steering Group Partner Background

Table 3a: East Community Assembly

Organisation	East Community Assembly
Type	Public Body
Responsibility	Promote community involvement in their urban open spaces; working with partners/communities around their improvement.
Spatial Area	East of Sheffield (4 electoral wards; Castle, Richmond, Arbourthorne and Darnall)
Relationship	Previous working relationship with majority of SG partners
Role	Represent CA members and the East Area

Table 3b: Green Estate

Organisation	**Green Estate**
Type	Social Enterprise
Responsibility	Consultation, design, site management, evaluation and place-keeping.
Spatial Area	East Assembly area (wider benefits to Sheffield)
Relationship	Previous working relationship with majority of SG partners
Role	Providing information, organising and facilitating

Table 3c: Sheffield Wildlife Trust

Organisation	**Sheffield Wildlife Trust**
Type	Voluntary
Responsibility	Land management, project planning and open space advocacy .
Spatial Area	Sub-regional (Sheffield and Rotherham)
Relationship	Previous working relationship with majority of SG partners
Role	Work at ground level and promoting strategic ideas

Table 3d: Sheffield City Council (Regeneration)

Organisation	**Sheffield City Council (Regeneration)**
Type	Local Authority
Responsibility	Socio-economical wellbeing of citizens and businesses.
Spatial Area	Sheffield Area (including wider economic city footprint)
Relationship	Previous working relationship with majority of SG partners
Role	Facilitating others to promote wellbeing of Sheffield citizens

Table 3e: Sheffield City Council (Parks & Countryside)

Organisation	**Sheffield City Council (Parks & Countryside)**
Type	Local Authority
Responsibility	Manage green open spaces and promote community use/engagement.
Spatial Area	Sheffield Area
Relationship	Previous working relationship with majority of SG partners
Role	Supporting the delivery of Green Open Space Strategy

Summary

The East GOSS Steering Group currently consists of representatives from the East Community Assembly, Green Estate, Sheffield Wildlife Trust and Sheffield City Council (Regeneration and Parks and Countryside Departments) and the University of Sheffield in an evaluator role. This partnership consequently represents input from a public body, Local Authority and voluntary organisations, academia and a social enterprise.

Organisational responsibilities, in relation to development and long-term management of open spaces within the East Area, range from strategic to 'hands-on' work. The Community Assembly and SCC Regeneration Department describe their responsibilities in terms of promoting community involvement in open spaces and ensuring public and commercial socio-economic wellbeing respectively. Green Estate, Parks and Countryside and Sheffield Wildlife Trust provide a combination of strategic, promotional and 'hands-on' approach including: consultation, project planning, site-management, promotion of ecological initiatives and place-keeping. The spatial extent of responsibilities ranges from ward-based to city-wide and regional. However, community awareness and perceived benefits extend beyond official boundaries for some organisations. For instance, Green Estate see their work as benefitting the whole of Sheffield and SCC maintain an interest in the wider 'economic footprint' of Sheffield including neighbouring areas such as the Peak National Park.

Prior to the creation of the East GOSS Steering Group, the member organisations had previously developed working relationships with each other over a number of years. These range from contact on an informal basis to discuss issues with open spaces to formalised service level agreements.

Although roles within the East GOSS Steering Group have not yet been formalised, members have been able to identify potential roles and responsibilities within the partnership. These include: sharing knowledge about the East community's needs, providing technical information, producing structured site development / maintenance plans, facilitation, gaining support at a political level and promoting/disseminating approach city-wide.

The East GOSS Pilot Steering Group aim to evaluate the effectiveness and transferability of an Area Based Approach and whether there is sufficient partnership capacity to deliver a GOSS despite current economic and political challenges.

Partnership Capacity findings

Below are the combined findings of responses received from those interviewed in relation to the six partnership capacity themes:

Capacity theme 1: Motivation

All partners cited a combination of personal and professional factors as motivation for their involvement in the East GOSS Area Based Approach. Although it was viewed as part of paid roles (CAM) (AO), it offered a new way of partnership working and an opportunity to develop personally and professionally (CAM) (RM). The Green Estate CEO explained 'motivation' formed one of the key selection criteria for the SG and has been termed the 'Coalition of the Willing. The fact the process was about 'tackling' rather than talking about issues particularly appealed to several members (CAM), (BN)(CEO). Other SG members highlighted the fact that the Area Based Approach was one which would work in terms of addressing current economic challenges and providing socio-economic benefits to deprived areas of the city increasing 'quality of life' (ERM) (AO). Additionally, the process had enabled members to become aware of green and open space assets in the area (RM) and importantly, an opportunity to celebrate achievements so far and realise the SG potential (CPM).

Capacity theme 2: Communication

Generally, it was felt that, although at an early stage, communication between SG partners was good and had a positive feel in terms of levels of trust developing (PM)(CEO)(AG)(RM)(CMP). Several of the members had worked together for a number of years and it was noted that the current chair had done a 'good job' keeping the SG focused and on task (RM). However, between meetings, one member felt communication was not particularly strong and that this may possibly be a result of stretched resources and staff availability (PM). One member of the SG explained they 'sometimes felt left out of loop' due to a 'communication gap' resulting from an incorrect name used on an email circulation list (AO).

Internal communication with colleagues had mostly been on an informal basis. The CEO felt this may be due to organisations having to deal with other priorities the moment (e.g. funding cuts) and a feeling of 'nothing to get their teeth into at the moment'. The nature of recent SG meetings implied more of a 'strategic management level' input (ERM). It was felt that communication with colleagues at other levels within organisations (e.g. groundwork) would develop as their roles became part of the East GOSS delivery (ERM). The strength of prior connections and relationships was cited as a big factor in terms of internal communications. However, it was felt to be important to let staff at all levels know their efforts have been recognised (PM). Another member stated it had been useful to feedback to ensure the 'work we're doing is what the SG wants' (RM). Use of the shared computer drive and presentations to the Community Assemblies were additionally noted as useful and effective means of communication to keep members 'up-to-date with developments' (CPM).

Challenges facing associated organisational and ultimately, city-wide communication and dissemination of the East GOSS approach included: reduced opportunities to network with groups (AO)(RM) and limitations on volume and budgets when circulating information (CPM). Although potential forums could be identified that the SG 'needs to get the timing right' (CA). It was possibly too early a stage until there was a 'common message' available to disseminate (PM)(ERM). However, ownership, a reasonable number of achievable tasks and 'not just been about Parks' were seen as advantages by (CEO). A need to sharpen up the action plan, a formalised process and strategic alignment were viewed as keys to enabling communication beyond the SG, possibly as part of an annual conference (CEO)(PM). The CA offered to inform other Assembly Managers by undertaking a co-ordinator role (CAM). The Green Estate CEO expressed a feeling that the city-wide approach had 'lost its way' due to undertaking so many tasks and that the 'SG could offer remedy' (CEO).

Capacity theme 3: Membership

Several SG members perceived the group as being relatively closed (ERM)(PM)(AO). The remainder varied in their impression of membership, with some citing that it was only the *process* of invitation that was closed (CAM), that membership was open (RM) and was 'not closed at all' (CEO). All members felt that the nature of the group was appropriate for purpose; an initial collective of interested individuals and organisations which could evolve over time (RM). The impracticalities of inviting everyone were equally recognised by the members.

The invitation process had primarily consisted of an invitation email from the Green Estate CEO (CAM)(PM)(AG)(CPM). Two members had been asked to takeover membership of the SG from previously attending colleagues as a part of their job roles (RM)(HO). Green Estate representatives explained selection was based on 12-15 years of working within the area; individuals with a holistic management approach, influence to make things happen and importantly, who were motivated. The members had been informed they could identify and invite others following the initial meetings. Although the SG meetings had been attended by 'core members', wider stakeholders were invited to subsequent training workshops (PM). An annual event was suggested by Green Estate CEO as a possible means of opening up the process further. However, the CEO was unsure who would undertake the role/responsibility for this as it was felt the role of Green Estate was more about 'action' than 'dissemination'. Funding and decisions on which of the members had the right and responsibility to undertake this role would need to be discussed further (CEO).

The majority of members reported feeling a 'good connection' within the SG, despite current job uncertainties (ERM)(CEO)(CAM)(RM)(HO)(CPM). However, one member (AO) described the current SG as the 'committed few' due to relatively low attendance at associated training workshops and felt this apparent lack of engagement could jeopardise the pilot project. Despite attendance issues, the Green Estate CEO described a 'real movement forward' following the second SG meeting. The members appeared to understand what the project was all about and could see the benefits; a 'collective understanding' had developed. The RM felt the SG had brought organisations and individuals together offering an opportunity to contribute a variety of skills and experiences which in turn enabled perceived connection to the project. Others described feeling 'honoured' to be invited and being able to 'bring something to the table' (CAM) and that their role provided an 'appropriate' elemental aspect of the SG (CPM). Potential links and connections with new partnership members, such as the University of Sheffield, could also be seen (CAM).

Capacity theme 4: Ownership

Several partnership members stated a 'definite' feeling of ownership relating to the SG process (CPM), (RM)(CAM)(ERM). The (PM) felt a positive element was that Green Estate 'was key player in leading the process' which avoided a Council-led project. This had been a previous criticism of the City-Wide GOSS. Other members commented although there were benefits to Green Estate undertaking a 'large role' in the process (MP), it may be beneficial to further promote ownership if each partnership member was given a particular 'theme to work on' (AO). When discussing the ownership of the process, the Green Estate (ERM) highlighted the importance of recognising the people in the East community must fully own the process for the proposed strategy to work. Equally important, was the need to formalise the process, allocating roles and responsibilities, otherwise the whole process would 'fizzle out' (CEO).

The P&C (CPM) felt the inclusive nature of the process promoted ownership of the partnership between members. The CPM explained that 'none had all the answers' and we were asked from the beginning if 'we knew others who should be invited to join'. P&C (AO) was unsure if everyone had 'bought into it' so far. Perceptions of ownership of the partnership were difficult to maintain if members missed meetings and the absence of influential individuals could prevent 'things moving on'. The P&C (PM) noted although members leading the process may easily perceive ownership of the partnership, this may prove more difficult for organisations in the Third Sector if they are unable to resource representatives to attend SG meetings and fully participate in the process. Development of

an open and transparent communication process which was accessible to all partners and stakeholders was essential (PM).

The partnership members felt ownership of the expected outcomes could manifest at both strategic and groundwork levels. Several members illustrated how they could be incorporated into policies and procedures as guidelines for maintenance and development of green and open spaces (RM), (AO)(ERM)(CEO). The (AO) P&C and Green Estate (ERM) equally, expected outcomes could be applied on-site as part of their respective roles, with the joined-up approach of partnership working providing an enabling factor. However, a budget to support the 'basics' such as bins for sites to meet the Sheffield Standards, was still essential (AO)(ERM). Once again a request for formalised allocation of roles and responsibilities was voiced, together with the production of a document to present to elected members and for public consultation (CPM)(CAM). Green Estate was suggested as a 'facilitator' for this process (CEO).

Partnership members all commented on the need to develop a shared process of dissemination based on an action plan which identified the 'who, what, when and where' of the strategy. Although ownership of dissemination was seen as having implications for all partnership members, SSC (RM) felt the Council had a key role to play in terms of distributing to a wider audience as possible. The Council intranet could be accessed and up-dated daily and the Local Strategic Partnership offered a forum to disseminate findings to stakeholders such as the University of Sheffield and the private sector. The CAM for the East Area also presented the Community Assembly as having a key role to play in the process. The strategy would require member and public endorsement with the CAM offering to undertake the important role of presenting it to elected members once a dissemination document had been developed and agreed. The Green Estate (CEO) saw the potential of building this initial document into one which could be applied at 'city level'. However, it was felt important by the P&C (CPM) in order to promote ownership of any document, that all partners and their respective input in the strategy were clearly recognised and acknowledged.

Capacity theme 5: Methods

The SG members all highlighted 'Map and Gap' as offering one of the most effective methods to develop an Area Based Approach. This technique offered a 'focus for resources, enabled prioritisation of work and follow-up and was a means of effectively providing information in an accessible format, which could be applied to practice (CAM)(ERM)(AO)(PM). It additionally offered an opportunity to 'take a step back' and gather area-based knowledge in one document as a 'starting point for a strategy, associated interventions and for use at Council meetings' (CEO)(CAM). However, several members highlighted a potential technological barrier in terms of sharing information as not all current and potential members would have access to the necessary software. For 'Map and Gap' to be wholly beneficial, the SG would need to ensure that it is widely available and accessible to all current and future partners (RM)(ERM)(AO)(PM)

The SG meetings were also viewed as a key method for the Area Based Approach in terms keeping the partners focused and providing an opportunity to discuss 'behind the scenes issues' (ERM)(PM). In addition to dedicating time to focus on the issue, the meetings provided a much need 'social aspect' enabling a rapport to develop with the group (CAM), breakdown any 'us and them barriers' (CPM) and prevent getting 'stuck in an e-mail world'. Several members (RM)(PM)(CPM) recognised the SG possessed the expertise to 'make it happen' and the meetings would provide a valuable method to enable 'like-minded individuals' to approach the issues from a 'variety of perspectives'. The need to formalise the meeting process to 'ensure commitment' was raised by the P&C (AO). Avoiding a Council-led approach, with its implications of a 'vested political interest', was also viewed as an important feature of the current meetings (AO). Employing a flexible approach to which partner organisations undertook a lead in meetings (e.g. groundwork or 'Friends of' leads) was mentioned as something for future SGs to consider if the approach was to be rolled out city-wide (CEO).

The minutes were mostly viewed as an effective method to develop an Area Based Approach, providing: a reminder and refresher prior to a meeting, formalised documentation of discussions and

the basis of an action plan which can be reviewed by the partners (ERM)(CPM)(CAM)(AO). The Green Estate CEO felt it was possibly too early to judge as only two SG meetings had been held so far but felt they would prove effective in the long-term and were in fact critical to maintain momentum for the programme. A lack of administrative support due to current funding cuts has placed extra pressure on members to produce and distribute minutes; one member had failed to receive any due to an incorrect email address on a distribution list (AO). The actual effectiveness of minutes was also questioned by SCC (PM) as they can be overlooked especially with already demanding workloads. This requires the development of an accessible 'in-your-face' means of communication to maintain partner involvement between meetings (PM).

Other methods identified by the partners included the Area Based Approach itself keeping the SG focused on one area, the Sheffield Standards providing a baseline measure for audits and outcome evaluations and the Parks & Countryside Site Management Plans which identified what organisations are aiming to achieve (CPM, PM). In general, members felt that methods which required input from all partners assisted in the realisation they all have the skills and expertise but need to support this with partnership working to 'make it happen' (CPM)(PM)(ERM)(CEO). There was a perception that members were making progress with their actions and this 'active involvement' stemmed from the fact that 'they wanted to be involved' (RM)(PM). Although possibly at too early a stage, using the methods to produce marketing and promotional literature could be an important function (ERM). However, there would still be a need to formalise roles and responsibilities based on member strengths and resources (AO, CEO).

Capacity theme 6: Expectations

Sub theme: Open Spaces

The East GOSS is viewed by partnership members to be a 'good strategy' where 'simple changes can have a big positive impact' (AO). The Green Estate (CEO) and SCC (RM) felt it was possibly the only way to sustain quality for green and open spaces in the area. The CAM expected the strategy to raise awareness of the potential within the East Assembly Area and of the links between areas. In terms of groundwork, the strategy could provide a much needed clarity regarding the prioritisation of spaces in the area (ERM)(CPM)(AO)(RM). The SWT (HO) felt this would enable 'better quality management and mix' of open spaces within the area and an alignment of resources would allow for the 'uplift' of priority sites (HO)(ERM)(CPM)(PM). Members from P&C and Green Estate felt this approach would ensure 'things happen' as a result of the strategy and would in fact be crucial to its on-going success (CPM)(CEO)(ERM). Sheffield Standards could be used as part of quality assessments and to measure outcomes (PM). However, Green Estate representatives highlighted the fact the East GOSS is a pilot and my not come to fruition unless it can be delivered through quality groundwork which is in response to a well thought out strategic approach (ERM, CEO).

Sub theme: East Assembly Area

Several benefits were perceived for the East Area through use of an Area Based Approach. The Green Estate (CEO) and P&C (CPM) cited that it would make application of a green and open space strategy in times of economic constraint possible; 'gaining rather than losing ground' (CEO). The (CEO) and (AO) felt focusing on ensuring the environment had the best possible chance would provide sustainability and consequentially, improved socio-economic value for all. It would also mean retaining the last 15 years of area-specific knowledge, experience and capital; 'continuing with what works and not repeating what doesn't' (CEO). The SWT (HO) and SCC (RM) felt the East Area would have an opportunity to promote its biodiversity and environmental heritage. If particular issues arise, the P&C (PM) suggested the Area Based Approach would make it easier to identify who would be the best person to contact, improving the efficiency and effectiveness when addressing issues. Several partnership members felt an Area Based Approach would benefit the East Area through increased efficiency in site maintenance and delivery and promote 'smarter thinking' (RM) however it was

essential that resources were not stretched (ERM,RM,PM). Knowledge transfer was identified as a 'product and driver' of the approach by SWT (HO) and Green Estate (CEO). Other members described knowledge transfer as a means of promoting future initiatives, where the successful replication of the approach in other areas would represent a 'massive achievement' by the SG (ERM)(CPM)(PM)(CAM). However, in order to realise this achievement, the P&C (CPM) explained there was need for a 'user-friendly strategic document' which provided a consultation tool to engage the East Area community and clearly explain 'why the budget had been spent where it had been'. The Green Estate (CEO) felt there was need for partners to employ a 'facilitation role' during the knowledge transfer process; 'knowing when to get involved and when to withdraw'. This would empower communities with confidence to engage in use and maintenance of their open spaces and so promote sustainability (CEO). Although Green Estate (CEO) and P&C (PM) were unsure in their respective interviews 'who had the right' to facilitate knowledge transfer, the CAM had recognised this need and offered to undertake the role of co-ordinator. This would allow the Council to commence the consultation process regarding the East GOSS pilot. However, the need for a document with a 'clear message and remit' from the SG to be presented was reiterated by the East Area (CAM).

Sub theme: Sheffield

Although the Area Based Approach was felt to be beneficial if applied on a Sheffield city-wide basis, the partnership members identified issues which would need addressing before this could take place. The fragmentation of services due to recent budget and departmental restructures and the possibility that some groups and organisations (e.g. 'Friends of') may wish to remain focused on their particular area could prevent the success of a city-wide approach (AO,ERM). Organisations working on different IT systems was an additional threat to partnership working and the capacity to 'roll out city-wide' (PM). However, the Green Estate (ERM) saw the East GOSS pilot as an opportunity to produce a set of guidelines which would aim to prevent fragmentation and promote partnership working. The SWT (HO) and SCC (RM) felt this approach would be 'attractive to others city-wide'. The CAM for the East Area also identified the potential of working with the 'Primary Care Trusts (PCT) and NHS Sheffield' to promote public health benefits across the city's assembly areas as it was an approach which was 'large enough to be acceptable but small enough to be relevant to local communities'. The CAM and SCC (PM) described the benefits of 'starting at a local level' to maximise the potential for success if the approach was to be applied on a wider basis.

Sub theme: Public and Private Sectors

All the partnership members expressed a potential for the public and private sectors to benefit from the Area Based Approach. Green Estate (CEO) and (ERM) explained a major factor in this occurring was the promotion of the East GOSS pilot as a way forward to provide 'a high quality environment on minimal resources with potential for massive socio-economic value'. However, the approach would need to be 'bought into at levels from ground workers to elected members' (ERM). The P&C (PM) highlighted that 'green space professionals had been historically weak regarding marketing but this would be important to address for the 'GOSS as a whole'. The need for a 'single document' to present to and engage involvement from public and private sectors was again stipulated by the members. Associated roles and responsibilities would need to be agreed upon with partner members delivering on their specific tasks. Should the dissemination role be 'shared between Green Estate, P&C and the CA?' and to 'what degree would local groups and media be involved?', were questions asked by P&C (CPM). The partners described potential for developing new links with, for instance, Meadowhall Shopping Centre as a large employer in the area, with associated opportunities to attract sponsorship and new employers and investors into the area (HO, PM, CEO). Public and private sector partners could become part of a 'green infrastructure' with benefits from addressing climate change to enabling personal growth (CEO)(AO).

Sub theme: Transferability

The partnership members all commented positively on the potential transferability of tools, training, methods, Area Based and partnership working approaches from their experiences as part of the East GOSS pilot.

'Map and Gap' provided a tool which could be used to deliver strategies and identify partner achievements, although training maybe required if it was to be used in other assembly areas (ERM)(CAM)(CEO)(AO)(RM). The P&C (PM) felt the 'Sheffield Standards' offered a further transferable tool for the Area Based Approach as it offered a 'common language' and an 'objective baseline' to measure outcomes. The SG members all mentioned the training sessions as providing an effective means of' promoting partnership working' and best practice regarding land management issues . It was generally felt that the use of training workshops, such as the 'Play Workshop' was a 'good model' to put into practice in order to meet training needs in other areas. Despite the pilot still being at an early stage, the SG members were positive about the potential for transferability for the methods used as part of the Area Based Approach. Knowledge transfer was described as 'very powerful element of the strategy' and the methods appeared to support this. The Green Estate representatives (ERM)(CEO) suggested that one of the strengths of an Area Based Approach was the 'continuity factor' as organisations tend to have known about and worked with each other over a number of years. Individuals and organisations will have a unique passion and understanding of their particular area and community (CEO). The SWT (HO) suggested that initiatives, such as the Living Landscape Agenda, would benefit from this approach, initially being explored at a local level before expansion to wider areas.

The collaborative approach of partnership working was felt by the SG members to offer a number of positive aspects which could easily be transferred to other areas. Having a 'Coalition of the Willing' (CEO) implied that the partners involved wanted to see a positive change and were willing to work together to achieve this. Having an independent body (i.e. Green Estate) to take a lead rather than being Council-instigated, was viewed as a 'good practice model' and was generally felt it would increase validity of the approach and strategy when disseminated. An 'inclusive approach' was also essential to any future SGs which could involve regularly asking 'who else can be involved?' and employing a flexible and adaptable approach to SGs enabling them to meet particular needs of an area as they change over time. Partnership working would also offer an opportunity to produce a collaborative, stand-alone website accessible to all partners (PM). The East GOSS could use this to provide information on open spaces such as the roles and responsibilities of particular sites. The SCC (RM) also noted that joint bids based on 'partnership working' were now positively regarded by potential funders. Other SG members recognised the opportunities to work with 'non-traditional' partners, such as Housing Association, Schools, universities, students and health and wellbeing practitioners as part of 'getting the message out there' (ERM). The only barriers perceived to this approach were the current budget restrictions preventing organisations from being able to participate or 'guarding income sources' and the impact of Private Finance Industries (PFI) which appeared to have a 'massive influence on what does and doesn't get done' (ERM). Although partnership working provides input from a variety of perspectives, the success of this approach was noted to heavily rely on the willingness of partners to comprise their respective organisational goals (RM).

Partnership Capacity SWOT results

Partner capacity results generated by the semi-structured interviews, were further evaluated through a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis to identify key issues. The results of this are shown below.

Partnership Capacity: Communication

Strengths	**Weaknesses**
Experienced, enthusiastic members who see potential in approach. Members with influence to make things happen Safe environment to develop trust in the process and SG	Common message not yet established Issues with the effectiveness of communication
Opportunities	**Threats**
Exploring alternative ways of information gathering and dissemination	Dissemination strategy not yet defined: who, what, why and how? Increasing demands on time/resources

Partnership Capacity: Motivation

Strengths	**Weaknesses**
Positive personal and professional commitment (Coalition of the Willing) Different way of working	Lack of clarity and tools in place to deliver outputs
Opportunities	**Threats**
Partnership working delivers joint prioritisation leading to trust Broadens approach of day to day remit	Uncertainty regarding employment Ineffective communication strategy

Partnership Capacity: Membership

Strengths	**Weaknesses**
Good selection of individuals and organisations to start the process	Lack of clarity regarding roles and responsibilities
Opportunities	**Threats**
Open up membership (links and expertise) to deliver objectives	Uncertainty regarding continued employment / resources

Partnership Capacity: Ownership

Strengths	**Weaknesses**
Positive establishment of potential for shared ownership	Lack of clarity: dissemination roles and responsibilities Input from members unrecognised due to communication issues Third Sector organisations unable to resource attendees
Opportunities	**Threats**
Strengthened partnership working Improved communication on all levels	Ownership becomes hijacked for political or private agendas

Partnership Capacity: Methods

Strengths	**Weaknesses**
Collaborative data gathering enables: knowledge transfer, prioritisation and awareness raising	Issues with IT tools: barrier to equal access to knowledge transfer
Opportunities	**Threats**
Joint development / input to meeting agenda SMART objectives to maintain momentum between meetings	Lack of formalised process, roles and responsibilities

Partnership Capacity: Expectations

Strengths	**Weaknesses**
Basis of good approach to deliver the EA GOSS Partnership working provides essential elements to see a positive change occur	Lack of definition regarding community role
Opportunities	**Threats**
Knowledge transfer / transparency in strategic decision making Expansion of EA stakeholder network Addressing the 'spending cuts' gap Driver of day to day activities Reduce competition for resources	Impact if partnership breaks down

Partnership Networks

The interviewed partners were also asked to comment on their relationship to, and understanding of, other partners involved in the East GOSS Area Based Approach. Partner network diagrams representing this combined interview feedback were then created, including additional partners identified by the interviewees as holding past or potential links.

- Existing SG membership (individual member responses) (Diagrams 1 -8)
- Composite of existing member diagrams (Diagram 9)
- Strength of existing linkages (Diagram 10)
- Ranked partners within the SG (Diagram 11)
- Existing and potential SG partners (Diagram 12)

Network Analysis

Individual interviewee responses (Diagram 1-8) show a focus on existing partnerships. However, they also demonstrate varying levels of recognition regarding current SG membership with organisations who are not yet involved, for instance Friends Groups and the Police, being identified. This could be due to either or a combination of:

- Ineffectively communicated or unclear information regarding existing partners
- Certain interviewees only recently becoming SG members or unable to attend all meetings
- Responses representing assumptions on who should be included in the SG based on respective involvement with various organisations and community groups

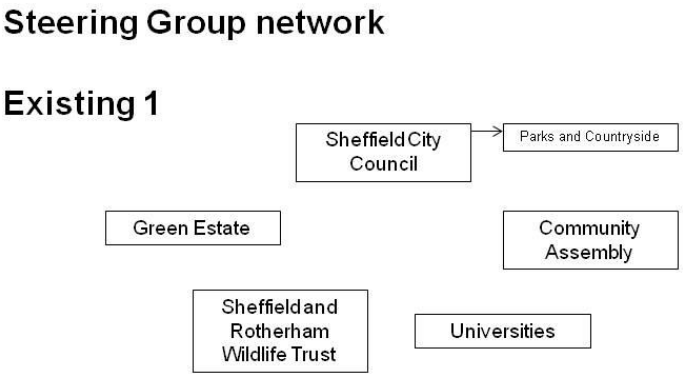
Identification of community/Third sector groups by half of the interviewees (Diagram 9) may imply a supposed importance associated with the inclusion of these groups within the current SG, or confusion with the wider city GOSS meetings where there is community representation.

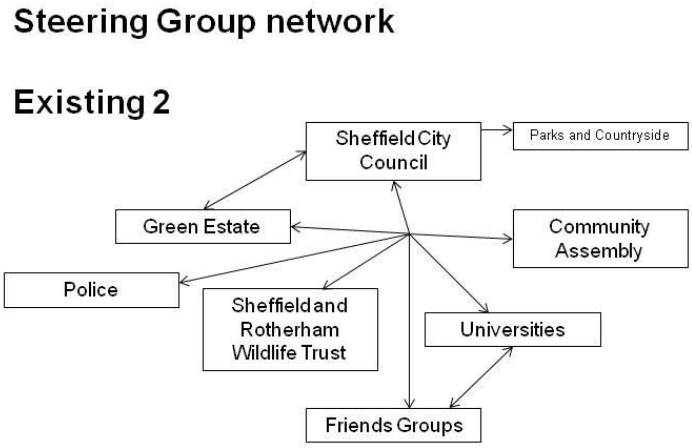
The identified strength of linkages (Diagram 10) appears to be greatest between those SG partners who may be assumed to be 'key players' (e.g. SCC, East CA, Green Estate, SWT and UoS). In relation to UoS, this is an interesting development, as originally the UoS were only involved in an observational capacity, not as a partner. In addition, only moderate links were identified between SCC and Council Departments such as Regeneration and Parks and Countryside, with weak/potentially vulnerable links between East CA and UoS and ECA and SWT. Perceived linkages appear to be influenced by previous involvement with individuals and organisations. A lack of clarity regarding partner roles and responsibilities within the SG may also have influenced perceived linkages. Additionally, interviewees who were not involved from the initial stages of the project may have varying perceptions of linkages compared to other SG partners.

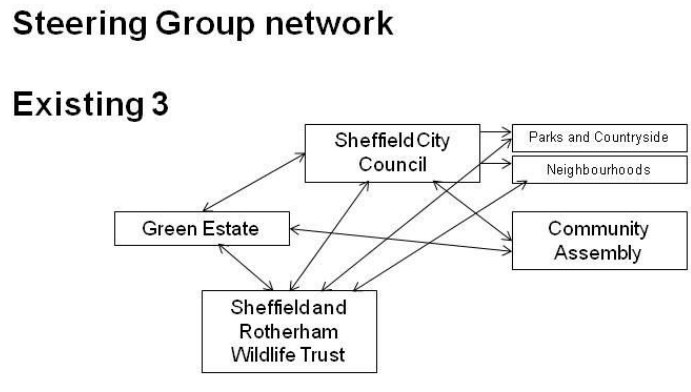
Ranking of SG members (Diagram 11) once again appears to be related to previous working relationships between partners. The high ranking of Green Estate, East CA and Parks and Countryside Department may also imply these SG partners are seen as playing key roles in dissemination, delivery of groundwork and having an influence at a political level to promote the East GOSS.

The identification of potential SG partnerships (Diagram 12) appears to reflect interactions of individuals depending on their respective roles and responsibilities; whether this is mainly strategic or involves increased involvement with communities and local groups through groundwork activities. Once again, strength of prior working relationships provides an important factor in this process and network understanding can also be influenced by recent contact with individuals, groups and/or organisations. The awareness and range of potential partnerships identified highlights a major benefit of partnership working within the SG and the need to involve individuals at all levels based on a horizontal rather than hierarchical approach to inclusion.

Diagrams 1 - 8: Existing SG membership

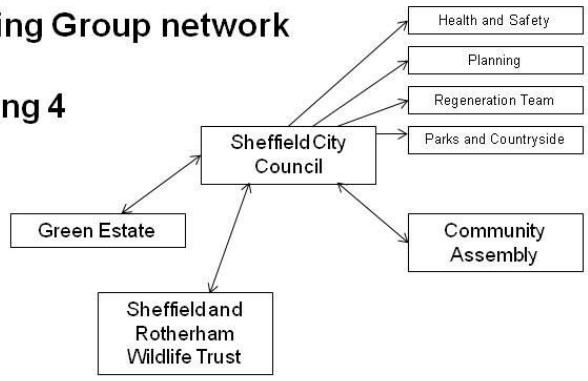






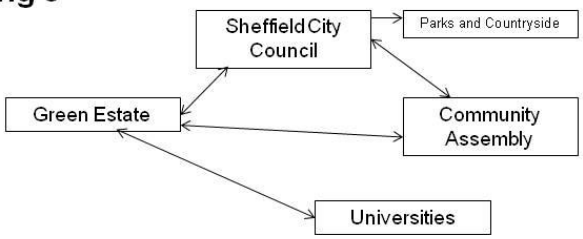
Steering Group network

Existing 4



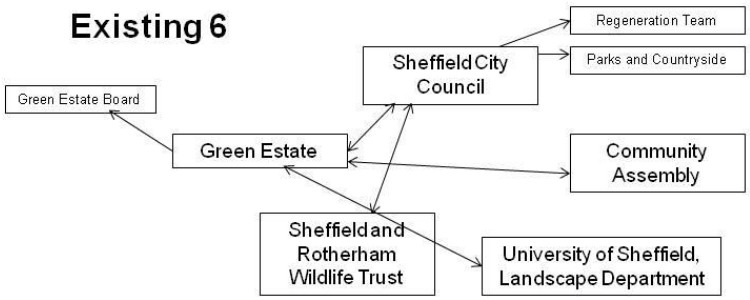
Steering Group network

Existing 5



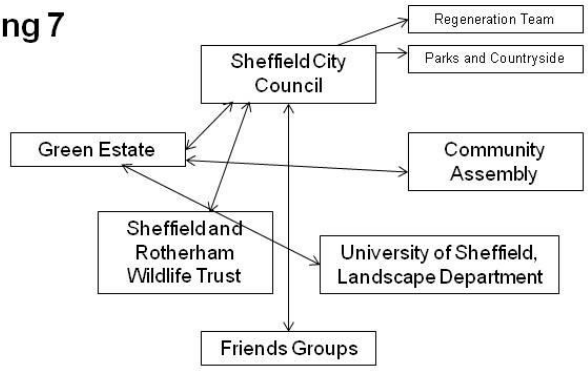
Steering Group network

Existing 6



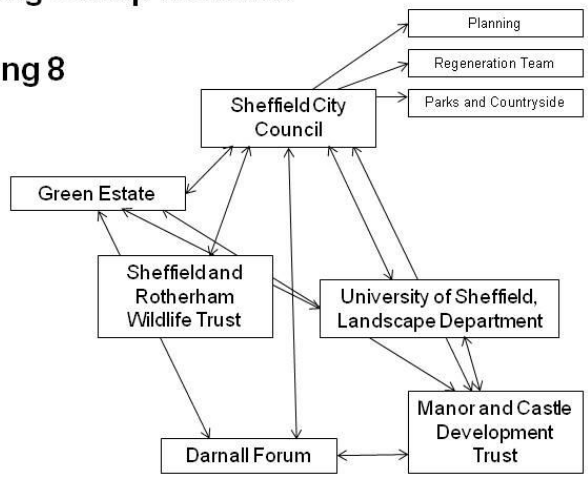
Steering Group network

Existing 7

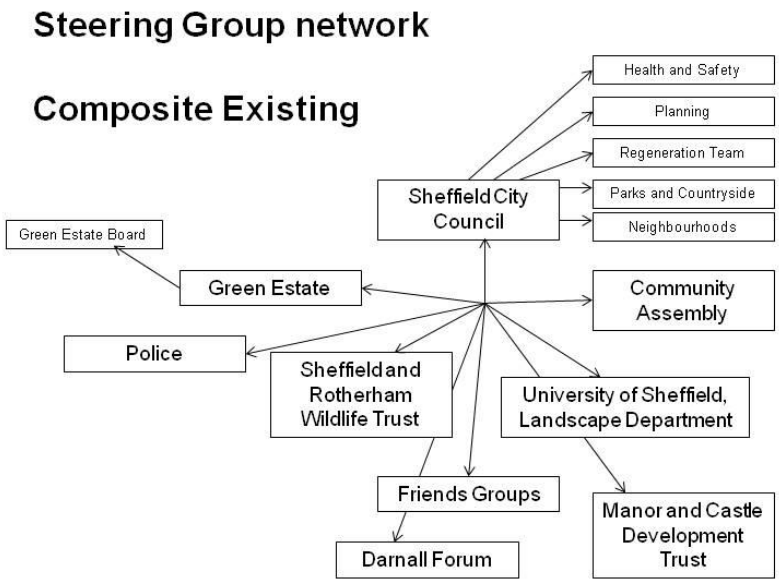


Steering Group network

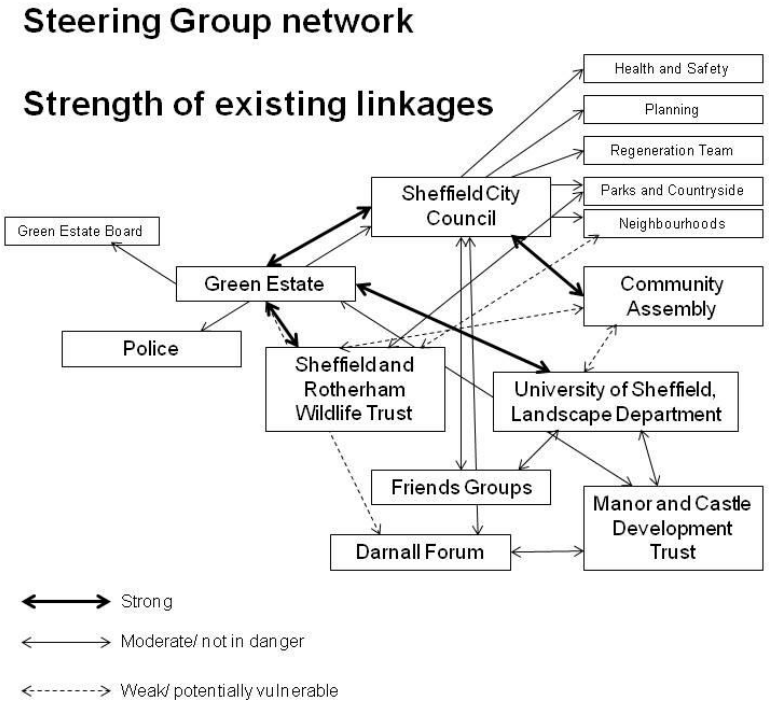
Existing 8



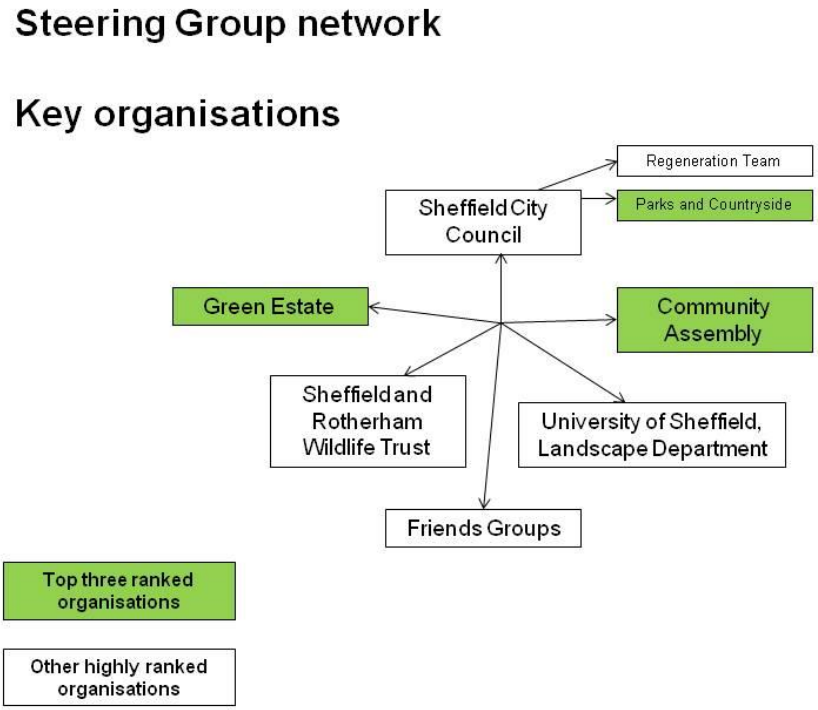
Diagrams 9: Composite existing SG membership



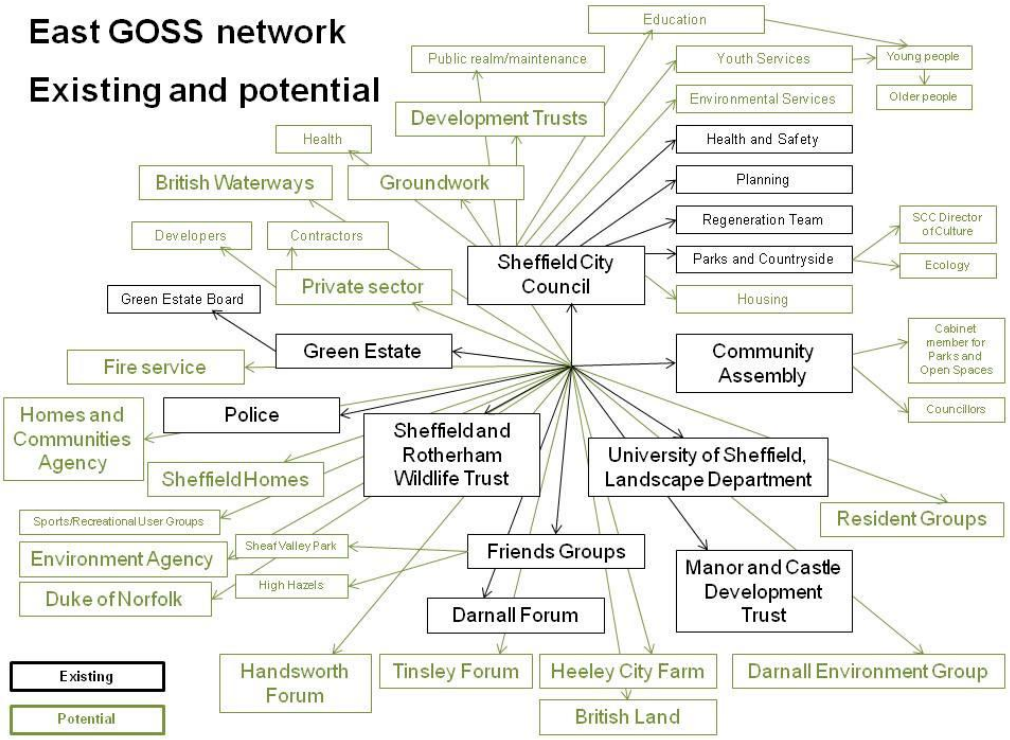
Diagrams 10: Strength of existing SG linkages



Diagrams 11: Key SG organisations



Diagrams 12: Existing and potential SG partners



Report Recommendations

The following recommendations are made to facilitate a successful partnership approach as the East GOSS Steering Group progresses into its next phase of action.

- **Define roles and responsibilities** (e.g. leadership, meetings and dissemination methods). Arrange an 'Away Day' (facilitated by UoS) to identify and define roles and responsibilities.
- **Adopt a model/frame of reference to provide a means of monitoring and improving SG partnership** and team development and effectiveness (e.g. The Healthy Teams Model (Mickan and Rodger 2005)
- **Apply/develop standards to provide a baseline for audits/outcome measures** (e.g. Sheffield Standards).
- **Craft and agree a common message** e.g. information gathering, promotion of East Area. Time to produce a well thought out strategy and present in form of a single, accessible document.
- **Focus on dissemination methods and approaches**. Use 'Map and Gap' and training workshops to enable knowledge transfer. Shared process between partners based on organisational strengths with respective input acknowledged.
- **Creation of Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Time-specific (SMART) action plans.**
- **Facilitate shared access and ownership of information** e.g. through a central website/forum. Include site-specific information e.g. activities and individuals/ organisations to contact regarding particular issues.
- **Information into action.** During the next stage in the process, CAM to undertake co-ordinator role to start consultation process; present to elected members followed by public consultation
- **Broaden awareness and raise policy and public profile**. Through organisation of an annual event (e.g. Sheffield City Council IC6 Learning Disability event)
- **Develop accessible means of communication to ensure momentum is maintained**, within the SG and success and efforts are recognised at all levels.
- **Continue with SG meetings as a means of providing time to focus energies** and develop strong, positive working relationships to promote/enable partnership working.
- **Use dissemination document to present to/initiate links with public and private sector organisations**; attracting sponsorship, new investment and improving quality of life for employees/community
- **Utilise Area Based Approach to promote (pilot) initiatives** (e.g. Living Landscape Agenda) at a local level before expanding to a wider area.

- **Continue to promote partnership working to maximise effectiveness of limited resources** and opportunities to succeed in funding bids. To achieve this by: maintaining a 'Coalition of the Willing', having an independent body to lead the SG and promoting an inclusive, flexible approach to future partnerships.

Glossary

Area Officer: Public role with one Area Officer assigned to each of the 7 community Assemblies. Responsible for the management of open green spaces (and in some cases buildings) within their community Assembly area

Community Assemblies: replaced Area panels as the lowest level of UK government. Community Assemblies are aimed at enabling the general public to have a greater say regarding priorities for public spending within their area. There are 7 Community Assemblies in Sheffield covering all the wards. Typically there are 3 councillors from each ward on a community Assembly board

Green space Officer: formerly known as regeneration officer, officer leads projects through development and implementation to support green space improvements across Sheffield representing the Council and working for the people. There is 1 Green space officer working for each community assembly apart from SW (Millhouses area) as assembly in that area has funded an extra officer. Each officer is responsible for all parks and green spaces in their assembly area

Local Councillor: Public role, in Sheffield there are 84 elected Councillors with 3 councillors for each of the 28 wards

Parks & Countryside Service: Public organization responsible for the management, maintenance and development of the city's parks and recreational greens. The Parks and Countryside service manages 730 sites citywide, covering 3,230 hectares and attracts 25-40 million visits each year

Community groups: Voluntary organization of local community members working to improve their local area i.e. Darnall and Manor Community Groups.

'Friends of' groups: voluntary organisations comprising members of the public getting together to make a positive contribution to their local area / park and help bring about change. The size of the group and the remit are determined by the group itself.

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25. Wild, T. C., Ogden, S., Lerner, D. N. (2008) An innovative partnership response to the management of urban river corridors - Sheffield's River Stewardship Company. 11th International Conference on Urban Drainage. Edinburgh, IAHR/ IWA.

Online resources

Steering Group Partners

- **East Area Community Assembly**
  https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/in-your-area/community-assemblies/east
- **Green Estate:**
  http://www.greenestate.org.uk/
- **Sheffield and Rotherham Wildlife Trust**
  http://www.wildsheffield.com/
- **Parks and Countryside Department, Sheffield City Council**
  https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/out--about/parks-woodlands--countryside
- **Regeneration Team, Sheffield City Council**
  https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/planning-and-city-development/regeneration/neighbourhood-regeneration/regeneration-team.html

Sheffield City Council website: general information and strategies

- **City Profile**
  https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/your-city-council/sheffield-profile.html

- **Sheffield Development Framework**
  https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/planning-and-city-development/planning-documents/sdf.html

- **Sheffield Green and Open Space Strategy (GOSS)**
  https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/out--about/parks-woodlands--countryside/green-and-open-space-strategy.html

National Green and Open Space Initiatives

- Transform Your Patch
  http://www.transformyourpatch.com/article/about